Release of Indian fisherman captured by Sri Lanka

3004. PROF. M. SANKARALINGAM:
SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:
SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the frequent attacks on Indian fishermen by Sri Lankan Coast Guards and Sri Lankan fishermen and also the damage and capture of their equipments and boats as reported in the press recently;

(b) if so, the details thereof as on date;

(c) the steps taken by Government to get them released and to stop recurrence of such frequent attacks and imprisonment of the Indian fishermen by the Sri Lankan Coast Guards; and

(d) the number of the affected Indian fishermen during the last five years?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes.

(b) Practical problems faced by fishermen of both Indian and Sri Lanka emanate from fishing vessels straying into each others territorial waters, internationally or otherwise.

With the Sri Lankan Government having placed a ban on fishing in their northern waters by Sri Lankan fishermen during the civil war, Indian fishing vessels found it feasible to fish in Sri Lankan waters. With the coming into effect of the Cease-fire Agreement, ban on Sri Lankan fishermen fishing in northern waters has been lifted. The Sri Lankan position is that the presence of Indian boats far within the Sri Lankan side of the IMBL, on a regular basis, cannot be termed accidental straying.

(c) As soon as information of apprehension of Indian fishermen straying into Sri Lankan waters is known, the High Commission of India in Colombo takes up the cases with the Sri Lankan Government. In almost all cases the Sri Lankan Government releases all fishermen immediately.

The two Governments are agreed that, in view of the humanitarian aspect of the problem faced by poor people for whom fishing is the only means of livelihood, the matter should be dealt with in a practical and compassionate manner.

Separately Government of Tamil Nadu has taken measures to contain the problem of our fishermen straying into Sri Lankan including (i) publicity against poaching (ii) stringent action such as heavy fines and revocation of fishing licenses (iii) a committee chaired by State Minister of Fisheries, has been set up to look into their problems (iv) the 1983 Marine Act is to be amended to merge with the Deep Sea Fishing Act to make it more stringent (v) educating fishermen on alternate livlihoods.

(d) Detention of Indian Fishermen by Sri Lankan authorities as on 31.03.03.

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	In SL custody
Fishermen arrested	55	26	25	85	116	168	
Fishermen released	53	24	24	85	115	138	
Released on bail	2	2	-	-	-	-	
Escaped	-	-	-	-	1	-	
Died in detention	-	-	1	-	-	-	
Fishermen currently in custody	-	-	-	-	-	30	30 as on 31.03.03

Evacuation of NRIs from Gulf

3005. SHRI N.K. PREMACHANDRAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have initiated any arrangements to evacuate the Non-resident Indians from Kuwait and other gulf countries in the event of war;